

## From the desk of Superintendent Dr. Monifa B. McKnight, Action Plan Update and Interim Staffing Arrangements

Montgomery County Public Schools <MontgomeryCountyPublicSchools@mcpsmd.org>

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Dear Colleagues,

In our [welcome back video](#) that kicked off this school year, our colleagues referred to one another as a “family”—a family of dedicated educators committed to the progress of students. The sort of progress that we strive for is only possible if we are working in safe, comfortable, and supportive environments.

In my positions as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, and central office leader in our district, I have always been aware that leadership plays a critical role in shaping the culture and climate of the working environment. One of my responsibilities as superintendent is to make sure that our leaders foster these environments and clear systems and processes in place to correct anything that compromises those commitments.

As you are all aware, the recent independent investigation conducted by the law firm of Jackson Lewis has highlighted some critical issues, particularly related to the sexual harassment allegations reported in the media in August. Yesterday, the Board of Education released a redacted version of this report, which I addressed in the Board meeting:



[Watch Video](#)

I am writing to provide you with key updates on our response.

### Interim Staffing Arrangements

On Wednesday evening, I wrote to our administrative and supervisory staff about changes in personnel. I am writing to share this information with you:

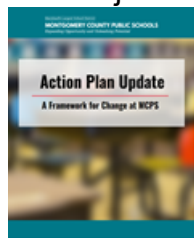
- Effective Monday, October 16, 2023, **Dr. Betty J. Collins** will serve as acting deputy superintendent. Dr. Collins, an MCPS graduate, enjoyed a distinguished 49-year career in the district as a teacher, principal, and director of Instructional Leadership, before her retirement in 2018.
- Effective Monday, October 16, 2023, **Dr. LaVerne G. Kimball** will serve as acting chief in the Office of School Support and Well-Being (OSSWB). Dr. Kimball served

MCPS for 37 years and retired in 2018 as an associate superintendent of elementary schools.

- Effective Monday October 23, 2023, **Ms. E. Lancellotti Dempsey** will serve as acting associate superintendent in OSSWB. Ms. Dempsey retired in 2020 after 31 years serving the school system. She was the principal of Shady Grove Middle School and Northwest High School and retired as the associate superintendent of human resources and development.
- The continuity of school support is a major priority for me. In collaboration with Dr. Moran and Mr. Adams, I am temporarily reassigning **Dr. Yolanda R. Allen**, executive director in the Office of the Deputy Superintendent, to serve as acting director in OSSWB. Dr. Allen has served the district for more than 20 years, including as principal of Goshen and Snowden Farm elementary schools. She will begin this assignment on Monday, October 16, 2023.
- Effective Monday, October 16, 2023, **Mrs. Michelle E. Schultze** will serve as acting executive director in the Office of the Deputy Superintendent. Mrs. Schultze served MCPS for 21 years and retired in 2020 as a director in the former Office of School Support and Improvement (OSSI), which is now OSSWB. Ms. Schultze also has served as acting director in OSSWB multiple times since her retirement.

### Action Plan Update: A Framework for Change

Our work to do better begins now. Linked [here](#) is a framework for how we will dedicate our efforts moving forward. Progress in the nine identified streams of work, from how reporting occurs to how investigations are conducted, will move us forward on our shared journey toward a safe and welcoming work environment for employees.



### Reporting Mechanisms

I want to remind our employees that MCPS has a [Report Waste, Fraud and Abuse](#) webpage, which serves as a hub for ensuring accountability, transparency, and safety for the entire MCPS community.



Our employees, including through the Montgomery County Education Association (MCEA), have encouraged us to make reporting mechanisms more prominent, and these resources can be found in the top right corner of every MCPS central office website page. A link can also be found on the MCPS staff page.

- **Safe Schools Maryland:** an anonymous tip line to report student safety concerns.
- **The Lighthouse Hotline for Waste Fraud and Abuse:** a mechanism by which any concerned individual can submit an alleged incident of fraud, waste, or abuse to an independent service provider.
- **Montgomery County Office of the Inspector General's Hotline** to report fraud, waste, or abuse related to activities in county government.
- **Ombudsperson:** Employees can contact the school system ombudsperson at [Ryvell\\_D\\_Fitzpatrick@mcpsmd.org](mailto:Ryvell_D_Fitzpatrick@mcpsmd.org) to make a complaint. The ombudsperson is an independent or neutral party who seeks to resolve school-related problems.
- **Directly report to the Department of Compliance and Investigations:** Employees can call DCI or email [DCI@mcpsmd.org](mailto:DCI@mcpsmd.org) to make a complaint.
- **Direct report to supervisor:** Employees can report complaints to their supervisor, who should then refer them to the Department of Compliance and Investigations.

In addition, employees can use [MCPS Form 230-39](#) when making a complaint of discrimination, harassment, or workplace bullying.

### Employee Support

Support for employees is available through the Employee Assistance Program, which provides professional, confidential counseling to employees and eligible family members on a wide variety of life issues. The In-House EAP can be reached at (240) 740-6500, Monday - Friday from 8:30 a.m.- 5:00 p.m. year-round. The external EAP partner can be reached at 866-496-9599, 24 hours a day/7 days a week. The EAP can connect employees who need more intense support as needed.

### Listening to Lead

We are committed to actively listening to our staff members, valuing every voice and concern. I will be in schools and offices in the coming weeks asking questions about how we can improve practices in the specific areas that the investigation has brought to light, as well as broader cultural improvements we can make to foster a positive work environment. Leading with a listening ear already has brought to my attention ideas about how to better support staff, especially our staff who serve special education students, as well as the impact that facilities have on morale, among other issues.

Thank you for your dedication to our students and colleagues.

In partnership,

Dr. Monifa B. McKnight  
Superintendent of Schools